ECA Update: January 24, 2014

In this update:

President Obama to release 2015 budget March 4

Politico
January 23, 2014
LINK

President Barack Obama will unveil his proposed 2015 budget on March 4, the Office of Management and Budget said Thursday.

"Now that Congress has finished its work on this year's appropriations, the administration is able to finalize next year's budget," said OMB spokesman Steve Posner. "We are moving to complete the budget as quickly as possible to help Congress return to regular order in the annual budget process."

The March date means Obama will reveal the annual budget more than a month before he did so last year - when he delivered it April 10. The budget will still be later than federal law requires, the first Monday in February.

In 2011 and 2012 Obama released his budgets the second week in February.

Regardless of the timing, Congress is expected to largely ignore the president's budget request. The limited election year work schedule and partisan fighting make it unlikely Congress and the White House can agree on a budget by the end of the 2014 fiscal year on Sept. 30.

More Information

ECA Peer Exchange: DOE Moving Forward
Washington, D.C.
February 27-28, 2014
Registration
Agenda

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Updated Agenda for ECA Peer Exchange: DOE Moving Forward

Washington, D.C.
February 27-28, 2014
AGENDA

An updated agenda for the for the ECA Peer Exchange: DOE Moving Forward is provided below. Register for the event here.

Thursday, February 27

8:00 am - 8:30 am
Breakfast and Registration

8:30 am - 8:45 am
Welcome and Introductions
Mayor Tom Beehan, ECA Chair

8:45 am - 10:00 am
View from the Seventh Floor
Mary Louise Wagner, Senior Advisor for NE (invited)
Betsy Connell, Senior Advisor for EM (invited)

10:00 am - 10:45am
Keynote Speaker
Congressman Mike Simpson

10:45 am - 11:30 am
NNSA: Modernization, Contracts and Working With Local Governments
Bruce Held, Acting Administrator, NNSA

11:30 am - 11:45 am
BREAK

11:45 am - 12:15 pm
Nuclear Energy Initiatives
Pete Lyons, Assistant Secretary, DOE-NE

12:15 pm - 1:45 pm
LUNCH - DOE Coordination
David Klaus, Under Secretary for Management and Performance

1:45 pm - 3:15 pm
Moving Forward with Cleanup and EM Priorities
Dave Huizenga, Senior Advisor, DOE-EM

Demystifying the Cleanup Budget
Terry Tyborowski, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Program Planning and Budget, DOE-EM

3:15 pm - 3:30 pm

BREAK

3:30 pm - 4:15 pm
Roundtable Discussion: Role of Local Governments in DOE Decision-Making

4:15 pm - 4:45 pm
Wrap-up

Friday, February 28

8:30 am - 12:00 pm
ECA Board Meeting
(ECA members and invited guests only)

Reservations Procedures for Liaison Hotel

To make your reservations call (866) 233-4642 and reference yourself as part of the Energy Communities Alliance group or provide the reservation ID: ECA221.

We have secured a group rate of $219.00 per night. The cut-off date for your reservation is Friday, February Please make your reservations early.

Meeting Reservation
Participants must register online at our Eventbrite page. The link to register is here.

ECA Members, Government and Public Sector Participants--$200.00
Private Sector Participants--$495.00

Most Hanford layoffs canceled

Tri-City Herald
January 22, 2014
LINK

Hanford contractors laid off just 12 workers this week, far fewer than the 289 they were authorized to let go.

The Department of Energy had approved three Hanford contractors to lay off a total of up to 450 workers in the fiscal year that began Oct. 1 and some workers who volunteered for layoffs had already been released.

Up to 450 layoffs were being considered when it looked as though Hanford cleanup might be hampered by another congressional continuing resolution with flat funding for Hanford because of no federal fiscal 2014 budget. There also was the possibility of another forced federal budget cut, also called a sequester.

Instead, Congress approved a fiscal 2014 budget last week that increased spending at Hanford to about $2.2 billion, or $186 million more

than was available in fiscal 2013.

Most of the possible layoffs, 350, were being considered because of budget uncertainties.

Layoffs began in December, with 161 workers approved for voluntary layoffs. Most received severance packages. That left 289 layoffs possible, with most planned for this month.

Washington River Protection Solutions, the Hanford tank farm contractor, canceled all its remaining layoffs this week. DOE had approved it for up to 250 layoffs, all linked to budget uncertainty. In December the contractor let 82 workers go through voluntary layoffs.

No more tank farm layoffs were needed after Congress approved fiscal 2014 spending at the tank farm of $520 million -- equal to the administration's budget request. Without the new budget, the tank farms could have had a budget of just $409 million.

"With final funding in place, we will be working with the (DOE) Office of River Protection to identify and implement project work using the funds," Dave Olson, the contractor president, said in a memo to employees.

CH2M Hill Plateau Remediation Co. was approved by DOE to lay off up to 100 workers and agreed to 44 voluntary layoffs in December.

The new federal budget eliminates the need for work force reductions because of budget uncertainties, John Fulton, CH2M Hill president, said in an employee memo. However, a small number of people could be laid off in the remainder of the fiscal year if their skills are not needed for the work the contractor is assigned, he said.

CH2M Hill is responsible for central Hanford and groundwater cleanup. The 12 people who lost their jobs this week worked for Mission Support Alliance, which provides Hanford-wide support services for DOE and the other contractors, including fire protection, security, utility service and information technology. All of the layoffs this week were for nonunion workers.

The contractor will continue to evaluate its work force through the year to make sure it has workers with the needed skills as ongoing work changes, said Deanna Hawkins, spokeswoman for the contractor.

Mission Support Alliance had been approved by DOE for up to 100 layoffs and agreed to 35 voluntary layoffs in December.

DOE commits to three-year, $4.5 million groundwater study in Oak Ridge

Oak Ridge Today
January 23, 2014
LINK

The U.S. Department of Energy has agreed to spend $4.5 million during the next three years to study groundwater contamination on the Oak Ridge Reservation.

The reservation includes three federal sites--East Tennessee Technology Park, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and Y-12 National Security Complex--that have been involved in missions ranging from scientific research to uranium enrichment to nuclear weapons work. That work has sometimes included the use of hazardous substances such as mercury and technetium-99, a slow-decaying radioactive metal.

The $4.5 million in funding will help implement a new groundwater strategy developed by DOE with help from the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The strategy, which was presented to the Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board in November, will help guide future cleanup decisions, said Sue Cange, deputy manager for environmental management in DOE's Oak Ridge Office.

Officials said there is no cause for alarm, and the off-site risks from possible groundwater contamination aren't significant enough to compel the EPA to require the Department of Energy to act.

"No one should be alarmed," said Daniel J. Goode, a research hydrologist for the U.S. Geological Survey. "DOE is managing the site. It's very complex. It's very contaminated. But they are protecting the public. There is no crisis here."

But during a November briefing to the SSAB, Goode said there are questions about the potential migration of contaminated groundwater off the Oak Ridge Reservation through very limited, discrete waterways deep under ground.

The groundwater project team, which also included representatives from UCOR/RSI and SAIC, recommended a three-year off-site groundwater quality assessment focused on the southwest side of the Oak Ridge Reservation. Residential wells and springs could be sampled and their contents analyzed to determine if contaminants unique to the ORR are present and if there is a potential public health risk from DOE contaminants. The results could be evaluated to determine if more action is needed.

The groundwater strategy document said there have been recent sporadic, low-concentration detections of radionuclides and volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, in off-site sampling locations "downgradient" of the ORR.

The contaminants are at very low concentrations, but DOE has put in place some land-use restrictions and provided water to residents, Goode said. There are off-site monitoring wells in Melton Valley between Haw and Copper ridges, and they have detected contaminants that could have come for Oak Ridge.

"There are no known health impacts from contaminants detected off-

site," the strategy document said. "However, in order to minimize groundwater pumping that could draw DOE contaminants off-site, license agreements restricting groundwater use have been put in place for some residents in the area west of the Clinch River across from Melton Valley."

The strategy said a number of radionuclides and VOCs have been periodically detected at low levels in monitoring wells in Melton Valley southwest of ORNL. There have also been intermittent detections of metals and VOCs in off-site wells on the west side of the Clinch River, across from the reservation, and two detections of strontium-90 and technetium-99 have been observed, the report said.

But with the exception of a low VOC detection in one well in 2010, no known DOE contaminants in off-site wells across the Clinch River from Melton Valley have exceeded safe drinking water standards, Goode said. And that one compound was not detected in subsequent samples from the same well.

Detection of the contaminants doesn't prove migration from the Oak Ridge Reservation, but there is a consensus that off-site migration is plausible, may have occurred, and needs investigation, Goode said.

Dave Adler of DOE-ORO said VOCs are not unique to Oak Ridge--they're used for activities ranging from agriculture to racing--but technetium-99 is. The technetium-99 was found in a DOE sampling well and only after aggressive drilling that could have drawn contaminants into the well, Adler said.

Goode said the groundwater strategy could include a revival of state-of-the-art studies at the Oak Ridge Reservation that could include academic and government experts. That type of approach seems to be under way with respect to mercury, Goode said.

He said there are many data gaps regarding groundwater contamination because there has been little investigative work since the 1990s. Since the early 1990s, DOE has focused on remediation and monitoring and less on science, even though there have been scientific advances in characterization and modeling in the past two decades, Goode said.

The project team's strategy document included a ranking of plumes on the Oak Ridge Reservation at ETTP, ORNL, and Y-12. They were ranked by pathway, hazard, toxicity, and longevity, among other things.

The top two plumes by what is known as a pathway score are contamination from undetermined sources on the southwest side of the reservation, southwest of ORNL's main campus and near the Clinch River, and uranium in Maynardville limestone at Y-12. The third is S-3 Deep nitrate in the Maynardville limestone in Bear Creek Valley west of Y-12.

The top ranking by what is known as a total plume score--the final results were heavily weighted with the pathway score--is a hydrofracture disposal site south of ORNL where waste was injected between 700 to 1,000 feet underground with cement. That site had the highest hazard score.

Goode said the ORSSAB could consider recommending that DOE collect, review, and archive records associated with the hydrofracture disposal site to support long-term stewardship. He said that waste will be at that spot forever.

Communications with the public could be an important part of the groundwater work, Goode said.

For some time, regulators have wanted DOE to evaluate groundwater contamination and develop possible responses. Officials said the new groundwater strategy will include the implementation of more groundwater investigation to support ongoing efforts to manage groundwater resources associated with the Oak Ridge Reservation.

"This is a great example of us trying to be more collaborative with the environmental regulators," said Michael T. Koentop, executive officer in DOE's Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management.

GAO schedules [Y-12/Pantex] protest hearing for Jan. 29

Frank Munger's Atomic City Underground
January 23, 2014
LINK

Babcock & Wilcox this evening confirmed that the Government Accountability Office has scheduled a Jan. 29 hearing on the most recent protests filed by B&W-led Nuclear Production Partners on the Y-12/Pantex combined contract award.

Such hearings are usually intended to help GAO better understand or clarify some of the issues in the responses filed by NP2 or the National Nuclear Security Administration or to gather information that the GAO needs to rule in the case. The GAO is scheduled to rule on the protest, which was filed in November, by the end of February.

Bechtel-led Consolidated Nuclear Security was awarded the $22 billion Y-12/Pantex management contract a year ago, and that decision was reaffirmed in another announcement in November.

Ralph White of GAO earlier this month confirmed that the DOE/NNSA response to the NP2 protest was received Dec. 23, and the NP2 response to the NNSA response was received Jan. 8.

Massive Hanford test reactor near Richland lifted

Tri-City Herald
January 22, 2014
LINK

A massive test reactor just north of Richland has been lifted out of the ground in one the most hazardous and complex cleanup projects along the Columbia River at Hanford, according to the contractor doing the work.

The reactor is the largest and last of the six test reactors once used for research at the Hanford 300 Area.

Getting the reactor out took three years of work and planning, including one major setback.

But sometime this weekend, Route 4 South from north of Richland to the Wye Barricade is expected to be closed to traffic as the reactor is hauled on a trailer with 384 wheels to distribute the weight of the 1,538 tons it will be carrying.

"We're going to scream out of here at 1 mile per hour," said Gary Snow, director of decontamination and demolition for Department of Energy contractor Washington Closure Hanford.

The reactor was used in the 1960s to test fuel containing recycled plutonium for possible use in commercial nuclear power reactors.

The reactor and its shielding will be disposed of at the Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility, a lined landfill for low-level radioactive waste in central Hanford.

The 309 Reactor, also called the Plutonium Recycle Test Reactor, was housed below ground under the 80-foot tall gray dome near Richland. Until it was cut off and taken down in 2011, the dome was one of Hanford's most distinctive structures near Richland and featured on postcards of the nuclear reservation.

Originally, Washington Closure Hanford planned to cut away most of the 5-foot thick concrete surrounding the reactor for radiation shielding. Then the 560-ton reactor was to be lifted out of the ground.

But when workers drilled into the concrete shielding, it proved to be too degraded from heat in the areas closest to the reactor for that plan to be practical.

"Every facility we go into has unknown hazards," Snow said.

Instead, Washington Closure and DOE devised a more complex plan to remove just enough of the concrete shielding to allow lifting equipment to be inserted and fitted around it. Then the reactor could be lifted out of the ground with the concrete radiation shielding and steel liner plates used for heat shielding intact.

That brought the weight of the lift to 1,082 tons, or more than 2 million pounds.

Pieces of concrete had to be removed to allow the lifting equipment to be lowered and to provide enough space around the reactor to lift it out of the ground. A crane lifted out concrete chunks weighing up to 10 tons.

More cuts with a wire saw were needed to free the reactor from the floor and walls. Workers also had to remove hundreds of pipes.

Before a frame for the lifting system could be installed, a temporary structure had to be built 32 feet below the ground to receive, move and assemble the lift frame. The reactor sat above the bottom floor of the building. Shoring columns were needed to reinforce the containment structure.

"What made the work hazardous was doing it in confined spaces," said Mark French, DOE project director for the work.

Workers also needed to wear protective clothing and respirators and work in summer heat and the cold of winter.

They also had to be prepared for radioactive contamination.

Work to lift the 1,082 tons straight up, with just inches of clearance, began Tuesday and continued Wednesday.

The lifting was done with four jacks mounted on a 30-foot tall mobile lifting frame. The total weight of the reactor with the lift-frame assembly, which will be hauled with the reactor to unload it at the landfill, is 1,538 tons and it stands 36.5 feet tall.

At the landfill, a 30-inch thick concrete pad has been poured inside a disposal trench and topped with soil where the reactor will be placed. The same jacks used to lift the reactor out of the ground will be used to offload it at the landfill.

Hanford officials will be watching the weather for the planned transport of the reactor this weekend. Conservative regulations for moving the reactor on the road require the temperature to be at least 32 degrees in the unlikely event that cold weather could cause a crack in the reactor if an accident occurred and the reactor fell.

The below-ground concrete structure that housed the reactor still must be removed and that should be completed by fall.

Having the reactor and the structure out of the ground will allow piping and waste sites in the area to be removed in time for much of the cleanup of Hanford along the Columbia River to be completed in late 2015.

"It will free the land up for future use" likely by industry, French said.